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Saturday April 8, 2006

Local News

Future of agriculture eyed at Friday meeting at MSU

By GREG TRAVIS
Staff Writer

Alternative Avenues in Agriculture, an overview of what's in store for the farm industry, was presented Friday afternoon as part of a conference for journalists in the middle of rural America. The event, "Your Job, Their Jobs: Covering and Guiding Rural Economic Development," was held at Murray State University's Curris Center. The conference was presented by the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues in conjunction with the West Kentucky Press Association Spring meeting.

Speakers for the conference were Keith Rogers, executive director of the Governor's Office of Agriculture Policy, and Laura Skillman, who runs the University of Kentucky farm news service and was often the state's best farm writer at the Messenger-Inquirer in Owensboro, it was reported.

According to material presented, "The end of the tobacco program means there will be fewer growers, larger crops, lower prices and a gradual migration of production to other areas of Kentucky, where larger, flatter plots of land are available." It was reported that many farmers will choose to get out of tobacco farming yet remain in agriculture.

During the meeting, Rogers and Skillman briefly discussed some avenues that they envisioned agriculture taking in the future.

"Farmers are facing numerous changes in their ventures with regard to costs and size. Kentucky is going through a major retooling in its agricultural infrastructure," he said. "For decades producers knew where the dollars were coming from, where the market was and in many cases what the quality would be," he said.

Kentucky's agricultural business is now faced with the same issues as the rest of the nation, he noted. "There have been mega-trends taking place including localization and vertical integration." He said Kentucky farmers were now competing with others in a global market as well as those raising chicken, hogs or other alternatives.

"Farmers are basically becoming contractors. We are even starting to see vertical integration in the grain industry. In addition Kentucky farmers are facing consolidation of the industry itself," he said. "Farmers' lives have become challenged by consumers and other outside factors. We need to look at all avenues for the future."

For complete story, see Saturday's *Ledger & Times*

Story created Apr 08, 2006 - 11:21:02 EDT.

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